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# THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED (GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES: RADFORD ORDNANCE WORKS TRANSCRIPTS OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

*interviews conducted by*

Ashley M. Neville  
Debra A. McClane

of  
GRAY & PAPE, INC.

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED

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U.S. ARMY MATERIEL COMMAND HISTORIC CONTEXT SERIES  
REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS  
NUMBER 6C



GEO-MARINE, INC.



US Army Corps  
of Engineers  
Fort Worth District

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**THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S  
GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED  
(GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES:**

**RADFORD ORDNANCE WORKS  
TRANSCRIPTS OF  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS**

*interviews conducted by*

Ashley M. Neville  
Debra A. McClane  
GRAY & PAPE, INC.  
Richmond, Virginia  
*Subcontractor for Geo-Marine, Inc.*

Principal Investigator  
Duane E. Peter  
Geo-Marine, Inc.

*under*

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
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550 East 15th Street  
Plano, Texas 75074

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## **CONTRACT DATA**

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## **MANAGEMENT SUMMARY**

This report contains transcripts of oral history interviews conducted as part of a project to document the World War II-era construction and operations of the Radford Army Ammunition Plant (RAAP), near Radford, Virginia. (RAAP was originally two facilities--the Radford Ordnance Works [ROW], near Radford, Virginia, and the New River Ordnance Plant [NROP], near Dublin, Virginia.) The interviews were conducted under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 014; the transcriptions of these interviews were completed under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 89. Both these projects were undertaken as part of a larger Legacy Resource Program demonstration project to assist small installations and to aid in the completion of mitigation efforts set up in a 1993 Programmatic Agreement among the Army Materiel Command, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Multiple State Historic Preservation Officers concerning a program to cease maintenance, excess, and dispose of particular properties. As part of the larger project to develop the national historic context of seven sample installations on a state and local level, the major focus of the project at RAAP was to document the impacts that the facility had on the state and local environments during the World War II period.

All the interviews were conducted by Gray & Pape, Inc. (Gray & Pape), under subcontract to Geo-Marine, Inc., during February 1995, and the tapes of these interviews were transcribed by the personnel at Professional Transcription Service, Dallas, Texas. Duane Peter, Senior Archeologist at Geo-Marine, Inc., served as Principal Investigator. Ashley M. Neville and Debra A. McClane conducted the oral history interviews.

The informants for the five oral history interviews all lived in the Montgomery/Pulaski County area prior to the beginning of construction on the facilities that make up the present-day RAAP. All of the interviews were taped. Unfortunately, it was not possible to locate and arrange taped interviews with people who worked at the plant during its construction or at the beginning of production in the early days of World War II. Of the workers who consented to participate in a taped interview, only Alene Graham worked at the facility during World War II; however, she was not employed until 1943.

Robert Bruce has long been a resident of the area. He was 96 at the time this interview was conducted. Mr. Bruce worked for the Norfolk & Western Railroad (now Norfolk Southern) in Radford. His daughter, Shirley Bruce, who was a child when RAAP was constructed, was also present during the interview.

Alene Graham was the only female among the set of informants. Ms. Graham worked in the Payroll Department for Hercules Powder Company (currently Hercules, Inc.), the contractor-operator, from 1943 to 1991.

Walter B. Harman, now retired from RAAP, was a supervisor in the Roads and Grounds division of the facility. Mr. Harman worked at ROW during World War II for about six months. His employment there ended when he was drafted. When Mr. Harman returned from service, the plant had largely shut down, but he was again hired in the early 1950s, when the Korean War began.

Howard Johnston, a current production employee, and the person with the longest tenure of all those employed at the facility was also interviewed. Like Mr. Harmon, Mr. Johnston worked at ROW for about six months before he was drafted and was hired again during the Korean conflict.

Leo S. Stanger was a security supervisor. He also was employed for a short time during World War II prior to being drafted and was rehired in the early 1950s.

The contributions provided by these individuals have been invaluable. The time and effort they took to participate in the project is greatly appreciated.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>MANAGEMENT SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS</b>	
Robert Bruce .....	1
Alene Graham .....	7
Walter Harman .....	19
Howard Johnston .....	23
Leo Stanger .....	29
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	
Release Forms .....	A-1

ROBERT BRUCE  
February 24, 1995  
**Radford Army Ammunition Plant, Radford, Virginia**  
Ashley Neville, Interviewer

*This is an interview for the history of the Radford Army Ammunition Plant. Today's date is February 24, 1995. I am interviewing Mr. Robert Bruce, who is a long time citizen of the Radford area, and his daughter, Shirley Bruce.*

*Mr. Bruce, where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?*

Mr. Bruce: We lived right here.

*In the Fair Lawn area of Radford?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah.

*Had you lived here for a long time?*

Mr. Bruce: We used to live over in Radford till 1925. My daddy built this house.

*When the plant was built, which was 1940, were you working at the time?*

Mr. Bruce: I was working at [inaudible].

*You were working for the railroad?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah. Went to work in 1916.

*Can you describe this area before the plant was built?*

Mr. Bruce: Well, it wasn't nothing over this side of that river then. Used to [inaudible] and never see a car [inaudible].

S. Bruce: That was 1925.

Mr. Bruce: I don't know. It's a lot more people here when they built the thing.

*What did most people do? Was it primarily an agricultural area? Did most people farm?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah. Some farmed and some worked at the pipe shop and worked up at the rock quarry at Little [inaudible], worked for the railroad. A lot of them worked for . . . [inaudible] worked for the railroad.

*Now, you said the pipe shop, is that the foundry?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah.

*Is it (Lunchberg?) Foundry?*

Mr. Bruce: Ah-huh.

*So there were some industrial jobs here in Radford, with the railroad and the foundry?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah. They all worked over there. [Inaudible] a railroad town, [inaudible] engineers and firemen and [inaudible], you know, section men.

*They all lived in Radford?*

Mr. Bruce: M-hm.

*So that's how sort of Radford grew was . . . ?*

Mr. Bruce: They just growed up in Radford.

*What was the reaction when people found out that the government was buying land in the area to build some kind of a plant?*

Mr. Bruce: Well, they just . . . [inaudible] is building this plant over here to make stuff for the war.

*What was the land like where they built the plant?*

Mr. Bruce: There was a big farm.

*Just agricultural?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah.

*They grew crops?*

Mr. Bruce: They had all kind of . . . raised corn and hay and . . .

S. Bruce: Did he have cattle?

Mr. Bruce: Cattle, raised hogs.

*Do you know where the new River Plant is located, the bag loading plant?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah, I know where it's at.

*And that was mainly agricultural also, with farms?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah, had the big [inaudible].

*Did people change their mind when they knew there was a munitions plant going to be built on the land the government was buying up?*

Mr. Bruce: I wouldn't think they did. I don't know that it changed anything.

*And your family didn't own any of the land that was purchased?*

Mr. Bruce: Uh-uh.

*When they started working on the plant, how did the area change?*

Mr. Bruce: Well, it just brought in a lot of people here and a lot of people from everywhere was coming here and going over there to work.

S. Bruce: There was as lot of traffic on the roads, bumper to bumper, all up and down this street.

*Was there enough housing to accommodate all these workers that came in?*

Mr. Bruce: No. Some of them, they went back home on them trains, you know, and they just . . . if they could find a place here to board, they did.

S. Bruce: One of our neighbors took in roomers and a lady up the road had several in her house, and we had this empty space above the garage and we could have rented it many, many times, or rooms in the house, but we never did.

*So people took in boarders?*

S. Bruce: M-hm.

*And now you said something about the trains? Can you tell me about the trains that ran to the plant?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah, they come from [inaudible] and Blue Field, [inaudible]. They'd come right up [inaudible] and bring the men. Then they'd lay over up there at the [inaudible] Radford [inaudible]. They had a place over there where they could put water in the coaches and had coach cleaners and we looked after the engines. There was work to be done on them, and then they'd go out there in the evening, go back over there.

*And pick up the people and take them home?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah.

*How did the people that had lived here for a long time get along with all of these newcomers?*

Mr. Bruce: Well, they didn't pay no attention to them I don't reckon.

S. Bruce: A lady in my church married one of her boarders. (Laughs) So they got along.

Mr. Bruce: (Laughs)

S. Bruce: And some of them probably kept contact for years with [inaudible]. I know the Signers did. They kept up with a family.

Mr. Bruce: I expect a lot of them people in these churches is people that come here then that's still here. I don't know. I bet I don't know a tenth of them that goes to my church over there. All the old people, (chuckles) they about died. Then there's a lot of new ones that I don't know.

*What did people do for entertainment, then? Do you remember?*

Mr. Bruce: No, I don't.

S. Bruce: The Radford Theater was thriving because there were lines all the way up and down the street, people waiting to buy tickets.

*Is this the movie theater?*

S. Bruce: The movie theater, the Radford Theater. Well, they had two theaters downtown, the Radford and the Virginian, and one at the west end called The State Theater.

*So that was popular?*

S. Bruce: M-hm.

*Did the plant, as far as you know, or the local community plan any activities for all of these new people, as far as entertainment is concerned?*

Mr. Bruce: I don't know of.

S. Bruce: A lot of the recreation [inaudible]. [Inaudible] a lot of people [inaudible].

Mr. Bruce: Made a bigger place, that's all. (Laughs)

*Was there a curfew for anyone during the war?*

Mr. Bruce: I don't think there was.

*Did anyone dislike the plant because it made munitions?*

Mr. Bruce: I don't think they did.

*Or did most people know what they were making out there?*

Mr. Bruce: Well, I guess they did. There was making stuff for the war.

*Did many women work at the plant?*

Mr. Bruce: Yes, a lot of them did.

*Were these women that would have had a job anyway, or were they mostly housewives that went to work during the war because the men had been drafted?*

Mr. Bruce: I don't know. Just a lot of women wanting a job and they took it.

*Were there any Black people or other minorities that worked at the plant?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah. There were Black people worked over there.

*Were they mostly local people?*

Mr. Bruce: Yeah, just people lived here went over there and worked.

*Do you know of any labor shortages in the area during the war?*

Mr. Bruce: No.

*Was there any controversies in the community about the plant being over there?*

Mr. Bruce: Not that I know of.

*Do you know what happened to most of the people who lost their jobs at the end of the war? Did they stay here and try to find more jobs, or did they go back to where they'd come from?*

Mr. Bruce: I think they all stayed here.

*How did the community change? How did the Radford area change after the war ended?*

Mr. Bruce: I don't know really if anything had changed.

S. Bruce: There was more people and more traffic.

Mr. Bruce: Yeah.

S. Bruce: And more money in circulation.

*So the plant locating here caused the area to really grow?*

S. Bruce: M-hm, [inaudible].

*Okay. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your help.*

*(End of Interview)*

ALENE GRAHAM  
February 24, 1995  
Christiansberg, Virginia  
Ashley Neville, Interviewer

*This is an interview for the history of the Radford Army Ammunition Plant in Radford, Virginia. Today's date is Friday, February 24.*

*Would you please state your name for me?*

Alene Graham.

*Were you living in this area when you heard the plant was going to be built?*

Yes, I was.

*Had you and your family lived here for a long time?*

All our lives. I've lived in this area ever since . . . I was born here.

*We're in Christiansberg, Virginia.*

That's right.

*When the plant was first built, were you in school or were you working then?*

I was in school and working also.

*Can you describe the area at the time?*

Well, just a small country town, something like Mayberry. Everyone knew everyone else. If you walked down the street, you never saw a stranger. But it changed over night.

*What did most of the people do in the area? How'd they make their living?*

Well, most of them were farmers or worked on the railroad. Of course, part of them, they had storekeepers and things like that. Mostly farmers.

*It was mostly an agricultural area?*

That's right.

*Now, when the plant was first built, how old were you? You were still in school?*

I was born in 1925. They started the plant in 1940, so I was 15 years old.

*And your family did not own any land where the plant was built?*

No, they did not.

*Since you did not work there during the construction period, but do you remember hearing any stories of what it was like when they were first building the plant?*

Well, I've heard them say that you would go into work today, and when you came in to work tomorrow, there would be a building already up from where there wasn't anything the day before, they were just building so fast and there were so many construction people in here at that time. We were told, and I don't know of any figures, but in all, with all this construction company and everybody that was in here, they said at one time there were around 25,000 people over there.

*Did most of the workers live in the various town around, or did they live at the site?*

Well, no. They built barracks over there and some of them lived in the barracks, but that was after the plant started operating. When the construction was going on, the people lived in the areas or they lived in Roanoke. They ran trains from Roanoke up to the plant each morning and back each night, and so they came in from miles around; drove in during the days, each shift.

*Was there bus service from Christiansberg?*

Yes, there was.

*The people that came to work there during the construction period, were they from all over or was it mostly locals?*

Well, they were from all over. You had a lot of people from the construction companies were . . . let's see, Silas Mason was one of them, and they were from Louisiana, so you had people from Louisiana. It was a lot of people from each area that the construction companies were from.

*How did the people get along? When they had so many people there, how did the permanent and the temporary residents get along?*

They got along alright. I think there was some suspicion because everybody had known everybody, and when all of a sudden you have all these people that you don't know, I think it's naturally that people become suspicious of something that they don't know, someone that they don't know, but all in all, I think they got along very well.

*Do you know what the construction workers did in the evenings or on weekends for entertainment?*

A lot of them partied. There was an increase, I think, in the consumption of alcohol and there was a very big increase in playing poker and things like gambling and things like that. One thing at that time, also, you had gas rationing and things like that. Well, the gas was rationed after the war started. This construction started in October of '40 and the war didn't start until '41, but part of the plant went into operation in April of '41, so part of these people would go home, wherever their home was, on the weekends.

*How did the area change during the construction period? Specifically, where were all these construction workers all housed?*

Well, people took roomers in. You might have a bedroom so maybe you'd have . . . well, in some cases, they had people working different shifts and somebody would be in a bed and they would go to work and somebody else came in and went to bed. I mean they had someone there going in each shift.

*So you could rent a room out by the shift?*

Ah-huh.

*But did a lot of people take in roomers or boarders and rent out other buildings they had for people to live in?*

Ah-huh. A lot of people built little buildings for people to live in.

*Now, what did you do before you went to work at the plant?*

Before I went to work at the plant, I was in school, and when I was 13, I went to work at a drugstore, and I worked at this drugstore before school and after school until I graduated from high school, and then I worked there full-time, until I was 18. And I graduated from high school in 1942, and then I was 18, then, in 1943, when I went to work at the plant.

*Did you have to be 18 to work at Radford?*

That's right.

*Before you started working at the powder plant, did you have any idea what it was like to work there?*

No, I just knew that they made a lot more money than I did where I worked. I made five cents an hour where I worked, \$3 a week, and then when you went to work at the plant, I got \$75 a month, which was considerable more. It was a fortune.

*Did you know what was done at the plant before you went to work there?*

No, I didn't.

*When did you go to work there?*

I went to work there in July of 1943.

*And you worked at the Radford Ordnance Works?*

That's right.

*Not at New River? And who did you work for?*

I worked in payroll for a man who is the Superintendent of Payroll. His name was Jack Hoff.

*And this was for Hercules?*

That's right. He had been sent here from New Jersey. He worked at a plant in (Parlene?), New Jersey.

*Can you describe an average day?*

Well, we prepared the payroll. Everyday they had a time card for each day, at that time, for the workers, and they brought the cards in. They dropped them at the gate when they went out, and they had a new card the next day. So they brought those cards in and we took the time off of those cards and put them on sheets of paper that we prepared the payroll from.

*Were the workers paid in cash or by check?*

Well, they were paid in cash first and then they were paid by check.

*When did that sort of change over?*

Well, the cash was when it went into operation in . . . well, these construction workers were paid by cash, too. I think they changed it probably around 1942 to check.

*At some point, was there any year-end compensation, like a year-end bonus?*

Yes, they had a Christmas bonus. Before they started having the bonus, they used to give them a ham or something like that, but then they started giving them, if they had been there a year, they would give them a week's pay, and if they'd been there less than a year . . . I mean a week's pay for less than a year and two week's pay for more than a year.

*How long did they do this? Was this just during the war?*

No, this was continued until about 1960-something that they changed that because the union voted to . . . that was one of the things in the negotiating union contract. They wanted the money put into their pay along, instead of waiting until the end of the year.

*Speaking of the unions, was the plant union or non-union? In the beginning it was non-union?*

That's right. I think it became union in 1953, somewhere along in there.

*This was the first time you'd worked for a big company.*

That's right.

*What was it like to work for a big company?*

Well, I don't guess it was any different than anything else, except you had more of an idea overall what was going on and you were just one part of it, instead of doing all of it, like you would where you were working before.

*Was the work stressful?*

No, not stressful. In fact, you just had to work hard, especially when we couldn't get any workers and we were short of help, and at that time, they would pay you so much, like \$3, I think, three to five dollars if you could bring someone in for them to hire.

*And when was this? What period of time was this?*

This was especially during the period of 1944, and at that time, we were so short of help that I would go to work at 8:00 in the morning and I would work till 12:00 at night. We worked double shifts. That was on Monday through Saturday. On Sunday, we only worked one shift, daylight.

*So you worked seven days a week?*

We worked seven days a week.

*How long did you have to work seven days a week?*

This was from October of '44 to about February of 45.

*Was it during this time when a lot of the men were drafted that the women started being able to work in production?*

Women started working in production I think around early part of 1943. So I guess that's why they did it. I don't know.

*What did you think of the plant's part in the defense effort? How important was it?*

Well, we felt like we were important or we wouldn't have worked those crazy hours. We were told every day how important we were. Well, I'm sure they had to get . . . it was at the time of the Battle of the Bulge in the Invasion of Normandy, and I think that we felt like we had to get everything out and to them.

*Were there different kinds of people working at the plant? Were there women as well as men and minorities working there?*

Yes, there was.

*Did certain people have certain kind of jobs? Did women primarily have clerical type jobs and men in the production?*

Women had clerical type jobs and they had production jobs, but the women's pay was always less than the men's for the same job. Like in starting out in production, they would start a woman out at 52 cents an hour and a man would be 62 cents an hour. There was always a ten cents difference in the rates, as far as a woman and a man in production jobs.

*How long did that last, that difference in pay?*

Till the end of World War II.

*Well, when the war ended, the plant closed, right?*

It closed from about June until November, I guess. They hired about 100 to 120 employees, and we made ammonium nitrate. Fertilizer.

*When the plant started back up, did women again work in production?*

There weren't any women in production on ammonium nitrate. We had women in production when we started the powder contracts again in about 1950.

*At that time, was there still a difference in pay scales between men and women?*

No, I don't think so.

*So by 1950, if you worked a certain job in production, both the men and the women got paid the same thing?*

That's right.

*And were there Black people that worked at the plant?*

Yes, there was. Very few, but there were. There weren't that many Black people in this area, but they were mostly orderlies at the hospital or they had jobs as cooks, orderlies and janitors, things like that.

*When they had so many women working, particularly in production, did the plant provide any day care facilities for the women for their children?*

No, they did not.

*Was there a plant or a company newspaper?*

Yes, there was.

*What kind of articles did they have in it?*

Well, articles about the people who worked there and about what was going on there and about the company, I mean things about the home office and about the government, the people who worked for the government.

*Were there any morale boosting efforts there, such as the why we fight promotion?*

Yes, we used to get different little badges to wear and we'd have pep talks and one time the Vice President under Roosevelt, Mr. Wallace, came and talked to everybody and made a speech. They had for morale boosters, too, we used to have a lot of the big name bands come. Over at the rec hall, they would bring these big name bands over there and we had dances and things like that.

*Did the plant win any Army/Navy E Awards?*

Yes, they did.

*What were these? Can you explain what that was?*

It was for hours worked and excellence in your powder and things like that.

*And was everybody really proud of being awarded an E Award?*

I think so.

*Did your ideas about working at the plant change over time?*

No, I mean I've always enjoyed my work and I was always glad to have a job and glad to be able to make the amount of money that we made, even though a lot of the people at home always thought that everybody over there made so much that they were all rich. But also it cost a lot to go over there, it cost a lot to dress to go to work and things like that that they never took into consideration, and besides that a lot of the ones that worked there had to have somebody look after their children and things, so they really weren't making that much more in the long run.

*Were war bonds sold at the plant?*

Yes, they were.

*Did they have drives to sell war bonds?*

They had drives very often to sell war bonds. You actually felt like that you were a traitor if you didn't buy them.

*I'm going to ask some questions about monetary concerns. What was the pay at the plant like, particularly compared with jobs on the outside?*

Well, the pay at the plant was considerable more than the jobs on the outside because the jobs . . . I really don't know how much the people made on the outside, but I know that it was a lot less than what they made at the plant.

*Did most of the people save their money?*

A lot of them did and a lot of them didn't. A lot of them spent it as fast as they got it. But there was a lot of people who spent their money, but they were also, by spending it, they were helping the people in the area because it was helping the local economy. Your grocery stores and everything was building up a little all along, you see.

*Now there's a couple of questions on the communities in the area. How did people get along, particularly during the World War II period when you had such an influx of workers for the plant?*

Well, a lot of them got along very well. A lot of people were suspicious of people, which I think they didn't know these people and a lot of the people were from the north and this is just a southern community and they felt like a lot of them were northerners. But, all in all, I think they got along very well. There was a lot of mothers and daddies probably wish that it never come in here because their daughters or their sons married and left and went somewhere else.

*Did the newcomers and the local people mix, or did they mostly keep separate, or did that change over time?*

No, it changed over time. They mixed.

*What did people do for entertainment?*

There wasn't a lot that people could do for entertainment, because you didn't have any way to . . . you only had gasoline to go to work. You couldn't use it for anything else. Some people did I'm sure, but most things you could do was go out and go to a beer joint and sit and have a drink or cokes or beer or eat potato chips and dance. That's about the only thing, really, that there was to do.

*Did the plant or the local communities plan any recreational activities?*

Well, the plant planned some recreational activities. They had things over at the recreation hall at the plant that they built over there. They had a lot of outside entertainment coming in and then they had things for the people who worked over there, and they even had a barber shop over there and they had a soda fountain and things like that for the people, so they could use it right there on the plant site.

*Was there a higher incidence of illness during the war because of the greater number of people here?*

Not that I remember.

*Were the water supplies and the sewage treatment facilities adequate or was there any sanitary problem?*

If there was, I wasn't aware of it.

*How would you say that this area changed during this time?*

Well, the biggest change was building up. I mean you had a lot of new homes being built. I mean a lot of things being built, especially right after the war, but I think it changed because of the economy during the war is the reason it changed after the war, because people coming back, especially boys from overseas and everything, they were getting GI loans and building houses and a lot of them were going to school.

*Was there any change about jobs, particularly for the local people? For example, most of the people before had been in agriculture. Did now the people, particularly the farmers, shift into a job, a wage job, instead of working on the farm?*

A lot of them did because they had . . . in fact, a lot of them probably gave up farming at that time.

*Was there a curfew?*

I think there was a curfew on teenagers in school, but there was a lot of blackouts at that time. We had blackouts that we weren't supposed to have lights on at night.

*Did anyone dislike the plant because it made munitions?*

They probably did, but if they did, I wasn't aware of it.

*How did the war and the plant affect every day life in the area, particularly as--I'll ask you three things. One is housing.*

Well, there were a number of small villages built in the area at that time, houses. They were built for the plant people and so there was three or four in (Blacksberg?) and some in Radford, small villages, and there were two that I know of in Christiansberg, and these houses were built and the people who bought them, bought them at a very low rate and some of the people still live in them right now.

*Well, now during the war, could you purchase them, or were they mainly rented?*

They were rented mostly during the war, and then after the war, the man who owned them sold a lot of them.

*Was there any changes in food availability? I know there was rationing during the war.*

Your food was rationed during the war, especially meat you couldn't get. It was hard to get meat, and even after the war, I think the meat went on till about 1947, somewhere along in there.

*How about the quality of life in the area?*

Well, I think people probably did a lot of things then that they wouldn't have done otherwise because . . . I mean a lot of dancing and partying and everything, it just wasn't done before the people came in who was used to that sort of thing, and I think that there was more of it done after the influx of the people coming in than there was before.

*So this area had been pretty quiet?*

Yeah.

*Before the war. We sort of talked about this already. Did many women work at the plant?*

There were quite a few women, basically in the offices and then there were a lot of women that worked in the lines in the latter couple years of the war.

*Would you say that most of these women had worked before or would have been working somewhere else if they hadn't been at the plant, or were a lot of them housewives that were . . .*

A lot of them were housewives.

*That wouldn't normally have worked?*

Ah-huh.

*Were there minorities working there?*

Yes, there were.

*Were they mostly from the local area?*

Yes, they were.

*If they were from the local area, then they stayed here after the war.*

Yes, most of them did.

*Were there labor shortages at any time?*

During the war?

*Yes.*

Yes, there was always labor shortages, especially in the latter part of the war.

*And how did the plant solve the problem? I mean you said you ended up working double shifts.*

The only thing they could do was they tried to hire more people, and if you could talk somebody into going over there and getting a job, you were paid I think it was around \$5 a person that they hired.

*At the end of the war, did a lot of people lose their jobs?*

Yes, they lost it the day that it was over. They were just told to go home. They had a forwarding address, you gave them an address and they just left, and then you had to figure up what pay was due them and mail it to them.

*So you mean like on VJ Day . . .*

The day after . . .

*Did they lay off most of the people the day afterwards, or did it sort of slowly decrease?*

Well, an awful lot of people never came back after VJ Day. I don't know how many there were, but I know that there was a large number of the people . . . that areas did not operate any more after that.

*Do you know what happened to the people who lost their job at the end of the war?*

Most of them went back to where they came from and the people in this area tried to find jobs, and of course, it was very hard because there weren't that many local jobs around or available. A lot of them went to work at Virginia Tech because Tech started building up because a lot of the boys who came back went to school, and that caused them to have to hire some people in different places around. There was rumors that the plant was going to be built over at Radford, a [inaudible] plant, but it was never built, and then the plant itself over here didn't start hiring to any extent until about the latter part of 1950, is when it started hiring. They had approximately 125 to 130 people up until that time.

*One more question about the end of the war. How did the community change after the war ended? Was there like a mass exodus of people that had been living in these rental houses that had been built and were there a lot of vacant houses, where people left and went back home?*

Well, there were some vacant houses, but you had all these soldiers coming back home and some of them had families that had been living with their families and they were hunting houses, and so you still had plenty of people to take the apartments and houses.

*Were things a little less hectic after the war?*

Well, I think so. Of course then it wasn't long till you had the Korean War and it all started all over again.

*I was just going to ask you did the plant actually close at the end of the war?*

At one time, from that June of '46 till about October, there was only one man there. There was a lawyer and his secretary and a man who took care of the files until about October of '46. And then they started hiring a few people back to do the ammonium nitrate contract.

*And that was for fertilizer?*

Fertilizer.

*That was shipped to Europe?*

I think part of it was shipped to Europe, and I know a lot of it went to Texas, but I don't know why it went to Texas. Probably to be shipped out down there.

*And you said that they really started hiring again in 1950. Why did they start hiring again in '50?*

Because of the Korean War.

*And so y'all started producing powder again?*

That's right.

*And it's never completely shut down since then?*

No.

*After the Korean War was over, was there a down turn in employment again?*

Yes, there was, but not to the extent there was in 1946.

*Did it build back up again when the Vietnam War was going on?*

Yes, it did, and also even after the Korean War was over in 1954, '55, it wasn't hardly any time until there was you had all this going on in Europe, Berlin, in Germany and different places that they were sending troops. It never really went down too much, but we had considerable less than we had during the actual World War.

*Now, when did you retire from there?*

1991.

*And how many years had you worked there?*

Forty-seven years and three months.

*Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your time.*

You're welcome.

(End of Side B)

WALTER HARMAN  
February 22, 1995  
Radford Army Ammunition Plant, Radford, Virginia  
Ashley Neville, Interviewer

*This is an interview for the Radford Army Ammunition Plant history. Today's date is February 22, and I am interviewing--could you please state your name?*

Walter Harman.

*When did you go to work at the plant?*

In October of 1951.

*Are you a long time resident of this area, of the Radford area?*

Since about 1937.

*So you grew up here?*

Basically, yes. Christiansberg.

*But you're not familiar about when the plant was being built?*

No.

*Now, when you went to work there, I guess that was in the build up for the Korean War period?*

Yes.

*What did you do before you went to work at the plant?*

Well, I had worked for Mason Hanger a while. I'd worked a short time at Burlington Mills. (Pause) I believe then on to the arsenal.

*When you worked for Mason and Hanger, what did you do for them?*

I was a material checker out of a warehouse.

*And what year was that?*

Nineteen-forty-four.

*So that was before you worked there. Actually when you went to work there in '50, you went to work for Hercules?*

Right. Right, that's correct.

*What did you do at the plant?*

Well, I was hired on as a clerk in a area maintenance shop, and before I left I had become a maintenance supervisor with . . . roads and grounds section is my shop.

*When you first went to work there as maintenance, was it also sort of roads and grounds, or was it in the production area?*

I was working in a maintenance shop in first row powder, in an operating area.

*And you described what you did at the plant. Can you describe an average day, particularly in the early period, in the 1950s?*

Well, at roads and grounds, we did as we used to refer to it anything anybody else didn't want to do. We had all the heavy equipment, laborers, we maintained roads, attempted to remove the snow from the roads in the winter time, repaired water breaks, we just did general labor work. We were actually a miniature construction company.

*To keep the plant operating?*

Operational, yes.

*What were the working conditions like?*

Well, to me they were real good because I like to be outdoors and I spent 85% of my time outside because we mowed the grass, we maintained the lawns around the buildings, we took care of the grass cutting for the entire plant, we maintained the fences in and around the plant, and it was all basically most of our work was outside other than when we were overhauling buildings or changing the building for some other operation.

*Was this the first time you had worked for a large company?*

Yes.

*What did you think about working for a large company, as opposed to a smaller one?*

Well, I really enjoyed it because we had a lot of support among ourselves. You probably were a little cog in a big machine, but it all, as we were told one time about our group, don't ever expect to get any credit for anything, but they can't operate without you. And that was pretty damn true.

*Well, did the plant provide any recreational activities for its employees?*

Not a whole lot until later years when we had the recreation department. We had like softball, basketball, this type thing. The Herc Club was organized. They had dances, socials, they had bus trips like to car races, shopping sprees, for instance for the ladies that wanted to go to (Williamsberg?) to the [inaudible]. This type thing, yes.

*Were the workers at the plant union or non-union?*

Well, for the early part . . . non-union, but early on in the '50s . . . early '50s, it was organized, yeah.

*Now, what kinds of people worked at the plant? Were there men, women, Blacks, Whites? Any other ethnic minorities that worked there?*

Well, we had men, women, Black and White. We had a few Spanish people, not many, a few American Indians, but not many of those.

*This is a pretty homogenous area that the plant's located in.*

Yeah.

*Did different people do different kinds of work, meaning did the women do one kind of work and the men do another?*

Well, basically, the women only worked in operating departments in clerical jobs or on the production lines. They worked in the production lines, but early on, no women, other than clerical, worked in the maintenance department.

*Did the plant ever provide any day care facilities to mothers?*

No. No.

*Was there a plant newspaper?*

Yes.

*What kind of articles did they have in that?*

A little of everything. They had want ads, they ran articles about maybe children of employees that had excelled in school or sports. Just a general newspaper.

*Were there any morale boosting efforts there?*

Not to my knowledge.

*But this was in the '50s and '60s?*

Yes, m-hm.

*How did it change over time? I mean in the '50s it was the build up for Korea. Then did employment levels decrease and then did that build back up?*

Yes. After the Korean War ended, at that time, we got down to somewhere around 1900 people, which is the lowest it had ever been since World War II. And then, of course, in the later years, most recent years it's gone way below that, but 1900 is the lowest I ever saw it.

*Then did it build back up for the Southeast Asia . . .*

Oh, yeah. We went back probably to somewhere around 10,000, somewhere close to that.

*This is about monetary concerns. How was the pay at the plant compared with jobs outside the plant?*

Basically, along about this time, it was better pay, probably Lynchberg's Foundry, in Radford, was paid better. Maybe the people that worked for Gulf and Western, and then in the more recent years, White Motor Companies in Dubland, but basically, we were paid better than the average.

*Was the pay the same for everyone, men, women and minorities?*

Well, in their classifications, yes, but different classifications paid different money. Skills.

*Since you were there mainly during the Korean period, you weren't there during the World War II time, I think that's all the questions I've got. But is there anything that you would like to add that I haven't asked you?*

Well, I think in the more recent years, like shortly before I retired in '89, people seemed to fear that they were going to do something that wasn't their job, if it wasn't something that was more or less their job description. I've heard a lot of people say, "That's not my job." And I don't want to hear that kind of stuff. We were used to if something had to be done, it didn't matter who you were, what you were, go do it. And this sort of started a trend with people 'I don't want to do this. That's not my job. Let somebody else do it.' I don't really understand that.

*So that's changed over time?*

Yes, yeah.

*Well, thank you very much, Mr. Harman. I appreciate your help.*

Thank you.

(End of Interview)

**HOWARD JOHNSTON**  
**February 22, 1995**  
**Radford Army Ammunition Plant, Radford, Virginia**  
**Ashley Neville, interviewer**

*This is an interview with Mr. Johnston at Hercules, who works for Hercules, Incorporated, at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant, on February 22, 1995.*

*Mr. Johnston, would you state your full name?*

My full name is Howard Kirk Johnston.

*And when did you come to work here?*

I began work here August 28, 1952.

*And how long have you worked here, or can you tell us was that an uninterrupted time?*

Well, I've hired in here four times. There was several interrupted times. All together, I've been here for 39 years. And the first time I worked here, I stayed here ten months, and then I was drafted into the Army and was gone for over two years. I came back and worked 13 months and was laid off again and was off about three years. I came back in June of 1959 and worked about six months and I got cut off again and was off about five months, and then I came back to work here in June of 1960, and I've been here ever since.

*When you left the first time, when you got drafted, was that during the Korean War?*

Yes, that was during the Korean War.

*What did you do before you worked at the plant the first time?*

Well, I came here right out of school.

*Was that high school?*

Yes.

*Did you have any idea of what it would be like to work here before you came here?*

No, I had no idea.

*Did any of your relatives or your friends work here? Is that why you came here or was it just an available job?*

Well, it was just an available job and I was right out of school and was looking for a job.

*A job helps, doesn't it? Each time you left and came back, did you always come back and do the same thing, or did it change each time you were reemployed?*

No. I was in production before I went into the Army, and when I came back, I went to roads and grounds. And then when I came back, in 1959, I worked with janitors.

*And that was just for, what, six months?*

About six months. Then when I came back here in 1960, I was on production.

*So you went back to production.*

And that was in the C-line, in the green lines. And I stayed there, with the green lines, until November of 1960, and then I was transferred to the rocket area. I stayed in the rocket area till July of 1964. The work slowed down in the rocket area and I went to roads and grounds again. I stayed there three weeks, job openings came up in the green line; so I went back to the green line. And I stayed in the green lines, then, until 1973, when I came back to the rocket area, and I've been in the rocket area since 1973.

*So you've been essentially in three different areas, roads and grounds, the rocket area, and the green line?*

Yes.

*Just sort of alternating between the three. That's interesting the way it sort of rotated back and forth, I guess caused by the demand on the outside?*

Well, the production scheduling here.

*The times that you were in the production, that was the first time you'd done any kind of this type of work, when you first came here?*

Yeah.

*Because you came right out of high school?*

Yeah.

*Has this been the largest company you've worked for?*

Yes.

*What do you think it's like working for a large company? Do they have lots of activities that a smaller company doesn't have?*

Well, they have the recreation hall, which I've never used.

*But it's been available?*

It's been available, yes.

*Did you think the work was stressful? Was there a lot of pressure on the workers to produce quickly?*

There are things that they [inaudible] when I first came to work here in the green line. On a job like this, you've got to produce. One of the main things is to produce a quality product safely, at a reasonable cost, is one of the things that has always been stressed here.

*Now I'm going to ask you a couple questions about the people that worked here. Were there both men and women working here as long as you've been working here in what I'd call production as well as support services?*

Yes.

*Did the plant ever provide any day care facilities for mothers that worked here, that you know of?*

Not that I know of.

*Were there specific jobs that mostly men did or mostly women did or other types of people, other races?*

No. In my opinion, they was pretty well equal.

*So it was a variety of people most anywhere. Do you know if there was a plant newspaper here?*

Yes.

*Did you remember what kind of articles were in it? Did you ever read it or see a lot of [inaudible] . . .*

I always read it. A lot of times there would be employee announcements of their kids graduating from school or things like that.

*So it helped you keep in touch with what was going on at the plant, as well as who the people were?*

Yes.

*Now I'm going to ask a couple questions about pay, and I'm not asking you specifically what you were paid, but how was the pay at the plant compared to other outside jobs?*

Oh, I think the pay rate here was above the outside pay rates.

*So this was one of the better jobs in the area?*

Yes.

*For two people working in production, would the pay have been the same, excluding . . . I don't know if the longer you are here the more you get paid, but for the same job, was the pay the same for like if a man worked at production, was his pay the same as a woman that worked there?*

Yes.

*Now I've got a couple questions about the larger community, the Radford, (Blacksberg?), Christiansberg area. How did the people get along during the time you worked here, meaning the people that worked at the plant with people that didn't work at the plant? There was no real differences between the two, were there?*

You're speaking of was there any conflict?

*Yeah.*

None that I know of.

*What kind of things did people in the area do for entertainment?*

Well, in the fall of the year, of course, there was always the high school football that was the big thing around here, and of course there was Virginia Tech sports that a lot of people were interested in.

*I thought when you said fall of the year, I thought you were going to say hunting, that a lot of people went hunting.*

Well, I don't know.

*Do you know of any recreational activities that the plant planned for its employees?*

Well, they had the (Herc?) Club here. I think they had different things, a Christmas party. I don't know when they started, but I know they planned trips.

*What is the Herc Club?*

It's a club for the employees here that if they want to join, I think they have to pay a dues.

*There was just a variety of functions they have?*

Yeah.

*More like the social event?*

Ah-huh.

*Were there any labor shortages during the time you worked here?*

None that I know of.

*It's usually the other way around.*

Yeah.

*Is there anything else that you think is important to know about the history of the plant that I haven't asked about?*

Well, one of the big changes that I've noticed in here is the changes made by the EPA. They have cleaned up the air, the smoke from the fire house, and the waste water, the waste powder incinerator, where they can burn powder without polluting the air.

*Have things like that made it a better place to work?*

Yeah, I'm sure it has.

*Have they been pluses?*

M-hm.

*Let me ask you about safety. Has safety always been stressed?*

Yes.

*How did they do that? Did they have safety meetings or training?*

Each group is required to have a five minute safety meeting each day before they start to work. Periodically, we'd get to see a safety film.

*So they'd keep you up to date on the latest practices?*

Now they have what they call a wrapping sheet that comes out each day that we can read and see what's happened in the plant, meetings of the executive board, see what goes on in their meeting. And there's another informational things in it.

*Is there anything else that you think I'd be interested in?*

Can't think of anything more.

*Well, thank you so much for your time. I appreciate your help.*

(End of Interview)

LEO STANGER  
February 22, 1995  
Radford Army Ammunition Plant, Radford, Virginia  
Ashley Neville, Interviewer

*This is another interview for the history of the Radford Army Ammunition Plant. Today's date is February 22. Today I am interviewing a gentleman who worked at the plant for a number of years. And what is your name?*

Leo Stanger.

*And I believe you said you grew up in the area?*

I did.

*Where were you living when you heard that the plant was going to be built?*

About a quarter of a mile, over on the farm, from where I'm living now.

*And that's about what, three miles from the plant?*

Roughly three-and-a-half miles.

*How long had your family lived in this before the plant was built?*

My great-grandfather was born in the area.

*So your family's a long time resident?*

Yeah.

*And how old were you when the plant started being built?*

Well, when I first heard about it, I was about 11. And when the actual activities began, it was 12.

*And so you were in school?*

Yes.

*Can you describe the area at that time?*

Well, if we go back to the 4-60 and we come on 114 toward the arsenal, I could count the houses on the Old Rural 114 on my ten fingers that was inside of the Old 114. It was very rural. We had a post office in Vicker, which is half-a-mile, a mile from here.

*Is that on the railroad?*

That's Vicker Switch, right on the railroad. And this was where all the activity in the community was at that time. Had a railroad station, a coal [inaudible] so the train stopped to take on fuel and water, and it was very

rural. Everything went back to farming, even the people that had jobs with the railroad. Everybody had a little farm. And we kind of dug our existence out of the land, so to speak.

*Did they raise crop for sale?*

Very few for sale, mostly for their own use. Now, when we get in this community . . . but now when you get into the property that the arsenal built on, they were more commercialized. They exported cattle. I've been told that it was something like five million feet of lumber cut off the area that the arsenal now has during World War I. So they were a little bit more . . .

*Right. Commercially oriented. I realize you were young, but if you remember, do you remember the reaction of most people in the area when they learned that the government was buying up land?*

It was a big thing happening, a lot of money coming into the community. The impact, insofar as the influx of people, I don't think they realized it. As rural as we were at that time, I don't think they realized what the impact was really going to be on the area, especially in this community. Now, if we move over to Radford or some areas like that, some of your business leaders probably realized it a lot more than we did in this area.

*So there was a great influx of workers when they started building?*

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They came in from Kentucky, West Virginia, Southwest Virginia, Roanoke, and for three hours every afternoon, before the [inaudible] road was built, New 114 was built, there was just a continuous stream of traffic for three hours every afternoon at 4:00, every night at 12:00 and every morning at 8:00 going in [inaudible].

*Each shift.*

Yeah.

*You or your family didn't own any land that was purchased by the plant?*

No. My grandfather had a plot of land that came right to . . . it joined the arsenal's property for around 2200 feet.

*But his did not get purchased?*

No, it did not get purchased. No.

*And I think you said that there had been a big flood in that area like the year before.*

This was 1939, I believe was a big flood. If I'm correct, in 1938, the Army started investigating the possibilities of this. The farmers in the basin, New River basin, I would call it, they didn't want to sell. Well, just about everything in the area got washed out during the 1939 flood. So after that, everybody started signing papers. One would sell, the next one would sell, so forth.

*Did the fact that this was going to be an ammunition plant affect anybody's feeling about the plant?*

I don't think so. I can't recall any negative information on it.

*And you did not work there during the construction era, right?*

Well, the end of the construction era, I worked for EC Erns, which was a subcontractor for Mason and Hanger, which was a prime construction contractor.

*And what did EC Erns do?*

He was an electrical contractor.

*So what kind of things did you do when you first went to work there for EC Erns?*

I was a clerk typist.

*So you were like in their office?*

Yeah, I was in the office and I was inside the explosive area, the fenced off area, and I wasn't but 17 years old. So when they found out I wasn't but 17 years old, they moved me out of that explosive area down into the River warehouse area, which they maintained. And I finished my summer's job out in the River area. And this was where I became knowledgeable of the POWs.

*Can you tell me something about the POWs?*

Very little. I can recall they came, as a youngster, before I went to work at the arsenal,--[inaudible] Creek went through my grandfather's property, and we would go down and fish at the creek. You might say it was a little illegal gigging. Nevertheless, when that moved in, we were afraid to go back down to that point where we started gigging, and we'd go down the railroad track to the entrance to the tunnel and we could see all the tents in the hold area and the Army patrolling the area, et cetera.

*So the POWs were housed in tents?*

They were. But they were on concrete pads.

*Was it a very big camp?*

Well, the camp was located what the old people knew as Coffee Pot Bottom, which part of the old Hurt property, which my grandfather used to raise corn on. And I'm guessing it was around three to four acres, not a large area.

*And what kind of things did the PO - . . . were these Germans, primarily?*

As far as I know, they were 100 percent Germans.

*What kind of things did they do at the plant?*

They run janitorial work in the barracks area, they probably worked some in the recreation hall--I told you--and they did some labor work. They built a railroad track between the two River warehouses during the summer of '45, and I got to know a couple of them pretty good. We wasn't supposed to give them food or anything like that, and I was the canteen boy, and I'd always slip this one I got to know real well a little five cent cookie when they come back from the canteen, and he would show me his pictures of his family, and you know, tears . . .

*Did he speak any English?*

Very little. Very little. We could always communicate just a little.

*Just a little with a lot of sign language and stuff?*

Right, right. Pointing and things like that.

*What did you think about the plant's part in the defense effort? Did you have a feeling of how important it was?*

Oh, yes. Everybody was very patriotic in this area and there were several, including my father, that was in World War I, and they realized the importance of what the effort was of the Army producing the propellants.

*Sort of later in the war, I know when a lot of the men were drafted, women were moved into a production areas as well. Were you aware of any of that?*

Absolutely. My wife's mother and her aunt, which is still living, worked in the production area. A lot of the women in the area I knew worked in production.

*Did they work in all areas of production?*

Well, yeah, mainly, because you only had in the production stage, at that point in time, you only had the green lines and first row powder and fourth row powder. So women worked in all those areas.

*Since so many women were working there, did the company provide any day care facilities for their children?*

Oh, absolutely not. That was unheard of at that time.

*You may not know this, and that's okay, but I was just wondering when women moved into the production jobs, were they paid the same as the men that had been working there?*

Yes. I believe they were. In other words, what we call SOPO, that was a production operator and they were all paid the same. Now, different work paid different, but if a man done this job . . . like a sewing machine operator and a row powder, men didn't do that, but they were paid pretty much in line, as far as production was concerned, as the men in production.

*Were there any Black people working at the plant?*

Oh, yeah, but we didn't have that many Black people in the city, but percentage wise, I'd say that the percentage was worked in there, however, their jobs were mostly in custodial work and this type of thing.

*I have a picture of them loading and unloading trucks.*

Yeah, laborers.

*Do you remember if there was a plant or a company newspaper?*

Oh, yeah. In fact, I've got a couple. Now, the company newspaper, we had a corporation paper came out and I've got some copies of that, for the '40s, but the plant paper started in 1951, I believe or later in '52 that is *The Hercules Press* I think it's called now.

*Were there any morale boosting efforts there during the war, such as why we fight promotions?*

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. You know, you had little buttons and little flags and all this type of thing. Patriotism, that was a big thing, war bond effort.

*I was just getting ready to ask you did they encourage the workers to purchase war bonds?*

Yes, they did. Even back then, perhaps you're aware that you could buy a little ten cent stamp and you put it in the book till you got \$18 worth and this type of thing. They promoted it from the ground up.

*Did the plant receive any Army/Navy E Awards?*

I can't definitely say, but I'm sure they did.

*I have a couple questions to ask you about pay. I'm not asking about what you were paid, but just general information about pay in general. Compared to other industries in the area, or other jobs in the area, how would you compare the pay at the plant to outside the plant?*

Number one.

*It was good pay?*

Good pay. Everybody would quit a job out here to go to the arsenal because like a mechanic was making 50 cents an hour here and the plant would give him 60 cents. And I've got some old records of in the security department of where they were at at that time in the '40s.

*Did most people save their money?*

Oh, yes. This was a very conservative community.

*How did the people from the plant get along with sort of the old timers that had been living here in the community?*

You know, a lot of newcomers came in and I never heard of any big to-do, unless you went around one of your beer joints or something like that; you might have some friction, but I know my grandparents took in boarders, boarded them and some of my cousins took in boarders. There was never any animosity.

*What did the people do for entertainment?*

Well, it was very scarce. Very scarce. (Laughs)

*Had to entertain themselves?*

That's right. You had two theaters in (Blacksberg?), one in Radford, one in Christiansburg. You had a few beer joints around. It was more of a traditional entertainment, you know, the family, [inaudible] at that point in time.

*Did the plant or the local communities plan any recreational activities specifically to keep the people busy?*

No, not during this era that I can recall.

*Do you remember if there was a greater incidence of illnesses in this area during the war because of the greater number of people?*

No. I can't recall that much change in the health environment. Now, the arsenal did promote what we know at the Radford Community Hospital now. The Army was involved in helping get that hospital built. At this point, we only had one hospital, in Christiansberg, to serve this whole locality.

*And that's when the hospital in Radford got built, was when they built the plant?*

Right.

*And there was probably some federal funding in helping get the Radford Hospital built?*

And if you're familiar with the Fair Lawn area, all that was built by the government, and rented out to the people to encourage them to come in. In fact, there's a house right up the road, one mile from here, that the government would come in and build a house on your property--was leased out--that when they were through with it, after the war was over, it would revert back to the property owner.

*They didn't have to buy it? It would just automatically revert back?*

Automatically . . . back. There's one up the road here today that I'm real familiar with. Now, the Fair Lawn houses, they weren't built that way. It was a different situation. The people had to buy them for like \$500 or real cheap.

*Were there many houses built by the government on other people's farms?*

Not too many. This one individual house up here is the only one I can recall being built on individual property. Because I know my father had seriously considered letting them build one on his property. But I don't know what turned him off, but it never happened.

*Another question about how the area changed during this time, would you say there was any change in the morals or values or affluence of the area?*

Oh, yeah. The influx of people brought in different, what I might call, cultures, which didn't reflect into ours. We got different religious groups in that didn't see eye-to-eye with ours. Yeah, moral values decreased tremendously.

*How about the affluence? Did the plant coming into the area bring more money in the area?*

Oh, yeah.

*And so in general, it . . .*

It was very influential in all your local businesses.

*How about ideas about having a job? Did a lot of people that previously just worked on the farm, after this was built, that they were more likely to have a quote a "paying job," say at the plant, as opposed to just doing agricultural work?*

Well, at that time, they'd go into the plant and pull eight hours, which they was accustomed to 12 to 14 hours on the farm. They still maintained a lot of their farms.

*So they actually did both?*

That's right.

*Do you remember if there was a curfew in this area?*

I'm not aware of any curfew.

*Was there anyone in the area that did not like the plant because it made munitions?*

I've never heard of a single person that was opposed to the arsenal.

*And I know you've said that housing was really scarce when everybody moved in. How about food? Was there any problem getting food in?*

Well, see we grew a lot of our food. We raised hogs, we slaughtered cattle, raised a big garden, and no. Now, during the food rationing, there was some problem.

*But that was because of rationing, not . . .*

That was because of rationing.

*Not because of the plant.*

Not the availability.

*I've got another question about women in the plant. Originally, were there many women that worked at the plant?*

Yeah, of course, yeah. I've got to go back that I was only 12 years old when it started, and as the war years increased, and the males shipping out to the war, it increased the arsenal, and then they was--I don't know what percentage--but a big percentage of females working in there when the war . . .

*Would you--and this is another one that may be tough to answer--did most of the women that came to work there, had they previously had outside jobs, or were they mainly housewives that went to work because of the availability of the job?*

Well, the ones I'm familiar with, they had outside jobs. Now, I'm aware of a few cases that were housewives and needed additional income and . . .

*So they went to work?*

Went to work.

*I think you sort of already answered this question about were there labor shortages at any time?*

Oh, yeah.

*But you said when a lot of the men got drafted, there was . . .*

The women started coming in. You could get a job, a 17-year-old, I could get a job anywhere. In fact, I drove a school bus when I was 17 years old after I left the arsenal on my first tour.

*Now, at the end of the war, what happened at the end of the war? How soon after the end of the war did the plant start gearing down?*

Finally, at a rapid rate. Now, I left in August or September of '45, and the war was winding down. And I went in the Navy in March of the following year, in '46, and when I came back in '48, it was just a idle spot.

*So they weren't doing anything in '48?*

Not as far as production was concerned. I think he had a nitrous [*inaudible*] program in there and they leased all the barracks area out to VPI.

*For students?*

Students lived in there. This type of thing.

*Speaking of barracks, can I ask you a question about the barracks during the war?*

Yeah.

*Were they always full?*

Yeah, running over. Running over.

*And they had cafeterias to feed the people that lived on . . . ?*

Yeah, there was a large cafeteria. I think the number of that building now is 213, I believe. And it lays right below the recreational building [*inaudible*], little flat building out in the [*inaudible*].

*What did they do in the recreational building?*

Well, they had game rooms in there, maybe a pool table. I can't recall a bowling alley at that point in time. They had a gymnasium and they had a pharmacy in there and a soda fountain and this type of thing. Very little recreation.

*Do you know what happened to the people that lost their job at the end of the war? Did a lot of them move away or did most of them try to stay?*

Well, most of the people that came in from South Virginia, West Virginia, they went back to the coal mining and back to that type of thing, but of course, some percentage stayed in the area and resettled and got local jobs.

*Well, how did the community change at the end of the war? You were sort of gone then.*

Yeah, I was gone from '46 to '48. So when I came back it had began to make a big change. Yeah.

*And when did you go back to work there?*

In 1950.

*Was that the build up for the Korean War?*

It was.

*And did you add more people during the Korean War?*

Now, when I went back and I went in as a fire fighter guard in 1950, and if I recall, Hercules only had less than 200 people there. Now, the government civil service had about that many people. So Hercules, at that point in time, didn't have that big of a work force. In fact, the salary people was like 50 or 60 people payroll, [inaudible] type thing. And of course 1951 it began to . . . late '50s, it started to build. The government came in and started contracting and redoing the buildings in the area. Company by the name of JC Jones . . . JA Jones, and they moved in late 1950, and they moved into the barracks area and that's where they set up their employment office and this type of thing, in the barracks here. And it grew from say 500 people, estimate, in late 1950. In 1952, we had somewhat over 10,000 people. So it was real rapid growth during that period of time.

*Now, did they make the same kind of products during Korea that they had made during World War II? Or do you know?*

Initially. Initially, because as technology advanced, they added the rocket line was made, honest John's and this type thing, but this was later on within the '50s.

*How about during the war in Vietnam? Was there a corresponding increase in employment at the plant then?*

Could you repeat that?

*During the war and Vietnam?*

Oh, yeah. From the Korean conflict, we had went down to about 1900 people in the late '50s, on a down slide from the Korean War? All right, in the early '60s, when the Korean conflict originated, we went back up to almost 10,000 people and remained between 7 and 10,000 for several years, on up into the '70s, and it started slacking off.

*Is there anything particularly interesting or anything you think would be helpful for me to know that I haven't asked about?*

Well, I'll think of it after you leave I'm sure. (Laughs) I think one of the things that, from my career standpoint with the arsenal, which was with security, that the difference in the attitude of security back in the '40s, '50s, when I went in and on up the line and what it is today is dropped from 100% security to 10% security. Now, we've had a [inaudible] downgrade in security to the arsenal since the end of the Cold War. And this was one of the reasons I retired. I seen this coming, you know, and I had a force of 103 people when I became Captain and it [inaudible] in about two years from that 103 or 5 to down to 88, and I couldn't get any replacements. And I seen security was on a downgrade, and the whole plant was downsized, and they came through with one of these buy-out situation, and I was ready to retire anyways.

*So you took it.*

I just took the early out.

*Well, what kind of--I don't want to say problems--but what kind of security things did you do, not you particularly, or did security handle, particularly in the earlier period, in the '40s and '50s?*

Oh, we had towers--I think they were 50 foot high--all around the fence. In the early '40s, you would have a tower at this point where it could see the tower at this point. You and a man--now this was on the fence line--and then you would have a man bumping from this tower and he'd walk to that tower. All the way around the fence line, which was probably close to 20 miles at that point in time. It was changed since. And, of course, after World War II, we went back to a fire fighter guard situation, and when I hired in, I would pull guard duty eight hours a day. I would pull fire duty eight hours, and then I would sleep eight hours, but I was on fire call in case we had a fire. But you got to remember most of the plant was on standby at that point in time, very little production.

*So did you work two eight-hour shifts in a row?*

I alternated. Today I'd work from 1:00 in the morning to 1:00 at night. Next shift I went in, I'd be off 24 hours. Next shift I went in, I'd work from 9:00 in the morning till 5:00 in the afternoon and sleep 5:00 to 1:00. So I alternated. That was rough.

*Let me ask you about union activities, and you may not remember during World War II, but was the plant unionized then, or do you remember?*

As well as I remember, just the construction people. Parts of the construction people, and not all of them. But as far as I know, the first union activity came in there in 1951. [Inaudible] remember.

*So during the time you were there, would you characterize the plant as being mostly unionized or only partially unionized? Or did it sort of come and go?*

Well, it was partially unionized until the end of '50s, and then it became 75 percent unionized. All your hourly employees was unionized, as far as Hercules was concerned. The union was voted in and I sat on the . . . during the voting period and heard all the campaign speeches of different unions wanting to get in, and there was about I'd say 60 percent of the people was join it at that point in time. [Inaudible] you know how unions operate. They kept getting membership built up to a larger proportion later on.

*Someone else I talked to mentioned pollution control measures that were taken in the later years. Was that a big change or not?*

Oh, yeah, because it put restrictions on production, put restrictions on management, of what they could do, and when these controls come in, large amounts of money was spent to comply with what the government regulation comes out with. This is what we, Hercules, had to deal with. In my field, security, they had your [inaudible] regulations laid out, what thou shall do and what thou shall not do, and a lot of it didn't make real good common sense, but it was still a regulation, and of course Hercules had to comply. I've had a lot of bitter feelings over the way our government operated along that line. I can quote you an [inaudible], and when I was a security specialist, the government come in and said you got to have hardened doors on all your magazines, you got to put these government approved locks on them, which I bought 500 at \$70 apiece back in the early '70s, which was just . . . and what didn't make sense, the safety regulation says you got to have a door back here that's [inaudible] over. They put a little thin oak strip, cost probably a nickel to make one, to fasten that door, but you had \$250 in this front door. See, all this just doesn't jive to me.

*Well, how about at the power plant? Did they clean up the air any?*

Oh, yeah. Yeah, they was constantly making modifications to the power plant to comply with the environmental standards. Millions of dollars was spent on it.

*Well, is there anything else you want to tell me about the plant?*

Well, not at this point in time. Maybe if you've got some questions to me, you can get back and ask me.

*Well, thank you very much for letting me interview you.*

(End of Interview)

(End of Side A)

**APPENDIX A**

**RELEASE FORMS**

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Robert Bruce

Address: 6062 Beltspring Road  
Radford, Virginia 24141

Phone: 1-540-639-6106

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

*U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Office of History*

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at Alexandria, VA and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

No Restriction

Restrictions (specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date 5-18-96

Interviewee(s)

Signature(s) Robert W Bruce

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Alene Graham

Address: 7 Alleghany Street SE  
christiansburg, Virginia 24073

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview.

*U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Office of History*

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Restrictions:

No Restriction

Restrictions (specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date 5/17/96

Interviewee(s)

Signature(s)

Alene Graham

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Walter Harman

Address: 114 Pershing Ave.  
Radford, VA 24141

Phone: 540-639-2531

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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Restrictions:

No Restriction

Restrictions (specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date 5-19-94

Interviewee(s)

Signature(s) Walter B. Harman

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Howard Johnston 132 Farley Circle  
Address: 107 Nelson Street  
Norcross, Virginia 24124 Pearisburg, Va.  
Phone: 540-921-0227 24134

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

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Restrictions:

No Restriction

Restrictions (specify):

I request copies of notes and tapes of this interview  
as stated above!

Thank you!  
HJ

Date 5-25-96

Interviewee(s)

Signature(s)

Howard Johnston

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Leo S. Stanger

Address: 2050 Peppers Ferry Road  
Christiansburg, VA 24073

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

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Office of History

Restrictions:

No Restriction

Restrictions (specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date 17-78-96

Interviewee(s)

Signature(s)

Leo S. Stanger

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer

Signature \_\_\_\_\_